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Pentecostalism and the Morality of Money:
Prosperity, Inequality, and Religious Sociality on the Zambian Copperbelt

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Abstract:

As part of a growing body of work focused on the social implications of Pentecostal Christianity, this paper explores one of the ways that this religion is shaping relational life on the Zambian Copperbelt. Through a discussion of the changing nature of the prosperity gospel, I show how Pentecostalism embeds believers in social relationships that often extend beyond their religious cohort. In the absence of the lavish wealth promised by prosperity gospel preachers, Pentecostals have had to alter their understanding of divinely authored economic success. Specifically, local definitions of prosperity are characterized not by uniform, individualized wealth, but rather by progress along a gradient of material achievement through relationships that span differences in economic status. This retooled version of the prosperity gospel serves to integrate believers into the wider social world by emphasizing material inequality and promoting displays of wealth. Each of these aspects of

Copperbelt Pentecostalism embeds its adherents in networks of exchange that are a central component of urban Zambian sociality. This analysis of Pentecostalism expands on studies of this religion that focus only on formal ritual life, while at the same time challenging interpretations of Pentecostalism that have given its social potential short shrift.

It appears that we are witnessing a turn in the anthropological study of Pentecostal Christianity, a turn towards a more robust analysis of the social, political, and economic aspects of this religion (e.g. Robbins 2009a, van Dijk 2009, Bailecki 2009; see also Marshall 2009). This development is both welcome and necessary: while anyone wishing to understand the ritual life of Pentecostals has had an ever-expanding ethnographic corpus on which to draw, analyses of this religion beyond the space of the church have been comparatively few. In making this claim I do not mean to imply that compelling arguments about the relationship between Pentecostalism and, for example, political economy have not been made. Indeed, much has been said about the meteoric rise of this form of Christianity alongside the expansion of neoliberal reforms throughout the Global South. At issue, then, is not an absence of possible connections between Pentecostalism and its wider contexts, but rather a lack of detailed ethnographic engagement with the lives of local believers as they unfold outside of the church. Only recently has the situation begun to change, and efforts towards an analysis of Pentecostal sociality represent an important step in the study of one of the fastest-growing religions in the world.

In this paper I offer an ethnographic examination of Pentecostal material and social life in the kind of community where this form of Christianity typically flourishes – a densely populated urban neighborhood in the heart of an extraction economy. My analysis is informed by twenty months of fieldwork on the Zambian Copperbelt, most of it in a township that I call Nsofu.ⁱ I argue that the particular approach to economic inequality and emphasis on material consumption that together characterize Copperbelt Pentecostalism work to foster social relationships both within and beyond the boundaries of this religion. By showing how this is the case, my aim is to make a small contribution to a larger understanding of what kinds of social ties (Engelke 2010), value structures (Robbins 2009b), or economic options (Guyer 2007) are created and foreclosed by conversion to this form of Christianity.

Through a discussion of the changing character of the Pentecostal prosperity gospel on the Copperbelt, I show the capacity of this religion to create interpersonal relationships within a larger social world organized by a material hierarchy. After outlining some of the particular, local characteristics of Pentecostalism, I turn my attention first to the various ways in which Nsofu believers describe divinely authored prosperity in terms of staggered progress along an economic gradient. I then address the social import of material inequality in the wider context of urban Zambia, where economic ambition is part of a larger cultural framework of exchange among households of different financial means. Having demonstrated that economic hierarchy is central to interpersonal life in Nsofu, I conclude by illustrating how Pentecostals not only understand the material aspects of their religious life in relationally meaningful terms, but also pursue religiously motivated forms of consumption that facilitate the development of material exchange and enduring social ties. Before showing how this is the case, however, it is worthwhile to highlight some of the ways that anthropologists have

approached Pentecostal Christianity, the late-capitalist economy, and the social implications of their intersection.

Pentecostal Ethics, Neoliberal Spirits

Pentecostalism is a form of Christianity oriented toward the immediate experience of the Holy Spirit, usually through practices such as glossolalia and prophecy (Dayton 1987: 15-33). Over the past several decades Pentecostalism has grown exponentially around the world (Robbins 2004), and sub-Saharan Africa has been a primary site of this expansion (Meyer 2004b). Central to anthropological discussions of this religion has been the prosperity gospel, a theological sub-strain within Pentecostalism that has enjoyed success in numerous churches. Also known as the 'faith gospel' or 'health and wealth gospel,' its message is that it is God's will for believers to be rich, healthy, and successful (Coleman 2000, Ukah 2005). Typically, proponents of this teaching ask believers to contribute money or goods in kind to the church; these gifts, usually referred to as 'seeds,' are understood to carry the promise of a divinely increased 'harvest' (e.g. de Boeck 2004: 198). Through such offerings, believers work to integrate themselves into a heavenly economy of superabundance (Hasu 2006, Wiegele 2005).

For many analysts, the widespread popularity of the prosperity gospel in the structurally adjusted Global South can be attributed to the increasingly inscrutable inner workings of late capitalism. Central to this interpretation has been Comaroff and Comaroff's work on 'occult economies' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 2000), which situates the prosperity gospel alongside witchcraft accusations, rumors of zombies, and lurid tales of Faustian pacts with the Devil. Through these discursive tools the disenfranchised youth of post-revolutionary

and post-colonial societies both ascribe supernatural origins to the seemingly spectral wealth of the neoliberal economy and attempt to access that same wealth through supernatural means of their own. In the prosperity gospel, Comaroff and Comaroff argue, 'Pentecostalism meets neoliberal enterprise' (2000: 314) as adherents to this religion pursue wealth that, while visible everywhere, consistently eludes them.

While many aspects of the occult economies argument are compelling, it is a mistake to read the prosperity gospel as simply a spectral parallel of the market, a phantasmagoric shadow of a structurally adjusted reality. When religion figures only as a super-structural epiphenomenon moving over the solid base of capitalist hegemony, the possibility that Pentecostalism might be a productive space with real-world consequences, 'a site of *action*, invested in and appropriated by believers' (Marshall 2009: 22), is foreclosed out of hand. What is missing here is any serious consideration of the idea that the kind of processes Weber attributed to modern Calvinist theology and practice – much less any kind of intentional social engagement (cf. Miller and Yamamori 2007) – might be evident in late-modern Pentecostalism.

In contrast to the occult economies approach to Pentecostal Christianity, several recent discussions of have illustrated the possible ways in which this religion might be socially or economically productive. Among these is Marshall's (2009) important study of Nigerian Pentecostalism, which employs a Foucaultian analysis of religious techniques of the self to highlight believers' program of social and political change. Using a very different theoretical approach, Robbins (2009a) suggests that one of the primary reasons for Pentecostal expansion among those most disenfranchised by late capitalism may very well be the ease with which this religion creates social cohesion despite the 'institutional deficit' of the

neoliberal global order (B. Martin 1998: 117-18, after Lash and Urry 1994). Because the various ritual practices of Pentecostalism are understood to be available to everyone and capable of being implemented everywhere, Robbins argues, they create and draw people into social groups with special alacrity.

Both Marshall's and Robbins' studies highlight the possibility that Pentecostalism might produce novel social and political relationships. Van Dijk (2009) makes a related argument in his recent discussion of Ghanaian Pentecostal migrants to Gaborone, which illustrates how this religion works to further integrate its adherents into existing social or economic frameworks. Van Dijk demonstrates that, rather than creating a parallel economy that merely echoes the structures of capitalism, Pentecostal churches 'catapult' migrants toward 'a modern engagement with the market on its own terms' (2009: 111). Prosperity preaching, insofar as it is part of the theological program of these congregations, is characterized not by injunctions to give seed offerings, but by instruction in entrepreneurship. It is this same emphasis on personal efforts towards prosperity that leads Berger (2008) to refer, perhaps infelicitously, to followers of the prosperity gospel as 'intentional Weberians,' whose confidence in the promise of divine wealth pushes them into the marketplace.

As these examples illustrate, when studying the relationship between Pentecostalism and economy the possibility that religious life might result in novel relational forms or the integration of believers in extant modes of social or economic organization must be taken into account. With this potential in mind, we turn our attention to Pentecostalism on the Zambian Copperbelt.

Nsofu Pentecostals and the Changing Face of the Prosperity Gospel

Today, just over a century after the arrival of the first western missionaries in Zambia, the presence of Christianity on the Copperbelt is inescapable (see Taylor and Lehmann 1961, van Binsbergen 1981). Missionary-established Christian denominations, including Anglican, Catholic, and Seventh Day Adventist churches, are an important part of the local religious landscape. In 1991, as the country was transitioning to multi-party democracy, the Zambian government made a constitutional declaration that it would be a 'Christian nation.'ⁱⁱ Within this wider religious context, Pentecostals account for a significant portion of the Christian population (Agha et al. 2006: 552-553), and the influence of Pentecostalism is evident on several fronts. For example, religious practice in non-Pentecostal churches has become increasingly 'Pentecostalized' as this newer form of Christianity has made inroads into the missionary-established denominations (Cheyeka 2006). In addition, the broader popular culture reflects the extent of the Pentecostal reach in Zambia: leaving Nsofu one is likely to board a bus emblazoned with a phrase like 'Holy Spirit Power' and spend the twenty-minute trip into town listening to a stream of popular songs denouncing Satan and claiming divine healing (cf. Meyer 2004a).

Copperbelt Pentecostals are sometimes part of transnational denominations, including the Pentecostal Assemblies of God (see Maxwell 2006 for a study of this denomination in Zimbabwe). However, my fieldwork was focused not on these large, centralized groups, but rather the independent, locally founded congregations that represent the most common type of Pentecostal congregation on the Copperbelt. I chose three such churches for extended participant observation, though over the course of my fieldwork I visited scores of similar

gatherings. The fact that there were so many churches to be visited is itself indicative of the wide reach of Pentecostalism in Nsofu. This community of about 25,000 people is home to many dozens of Pentecostal churches and fellowships, most of which were less than ten years old, boasted fewer than 100 members, and met either in private homes or rented classrooms in the government primary school.

In Nsofu's many Pentecostal churches the influence of the prosperity gospel was clear. Leaders and laity alike expressed confidence that it was God's will for them to experience 'prosperity,' a term usually used in Englishⁱⁱⁱ that they connected not only to economic advancement, but also to physical health, strong family ties, and spiritual development. One of the hallmarks of this approach to Christianity on the Copperbelt is the belief that divinely authored prosperity is an index of personal salvation, and individual markers of the former – whether a marriage, good health, or a new upholstered chair – are therefore imbued with apologetic and evangelistic value.

Despite this commitment to a Pentecostal idea of progress, however, I found that the prosperity gospel in Nsofu had in many ways been altered from its paradigmatic form. This was in part because a number of local Pentecostals had fallen prey to what they identified as 'false prophets:' itinerate preachers who demanded material seeds in exchange for the promise of divine blessings and who, in the eyes of believers, were ultimately revealed to be charlatans, Satanists, or sinners. Beyond these negative experiences, Copperbelt Pentecostals have also had to face the fact that, despite their faithful religious adherence, the riches of the prosperity gospel regularly elude them. The erratic mining economy on which many depend for their livelihoods ensured that few of my informants had access to the tailored suits, luxury cars, or cutting-edge electronics often associated with Pentecostal preaching.

In the absence of lavish wealth and in the light of their experiences with false prophets, Copperbelt believers have reconfigured the prosperity gospel through a local process of nuancing and critique paralleled in other contexts (cf. Maxwell 1998: 366). The trademark prosperity practice of sowing monetary seeds, for instance, was carefully circumscribed in Nsofu, and the give-to-get message that figures prominently in the ethnographic literature on Pentecostalism had also been dialed down. Nsofu believers have expanded the definition of prosperity to include intangible blessings; qualified it with caveats about the speed with which blessing can be expected (cf. Lindhardt 2009); and, as we will see, staggered their expectations of prosperity along a continuum of material advancement.

This retooling of the prosperity message makes it inappropriate to describe Copperbelt Pentecostals as followers of the prosperity gospel. Instead, I would argue that because believers maintain that it is God's will for them to prosper, while at the same time participating in a theological project aimed at defining and delimiting this belief, Nsofu Pentecostals are best characterized as adherents to what is at best a limited prosperity gospel. While this distinction might seem like an unnecessary exercise in ethnographic hair-splitting, the fact that this kind of Pentecostalism is being transformed into something different on the Copperbelt is important because it addresses a central question in the study of the prosperity gospel: What happens when prosperity fails? How, as Meyer (2004b: 460) puts it, has this teaching avoided being 'subverted by its own appeal' in the absence of the lavish wealth promised by its proponents? (see also D. Martin 1990: 232).

By using a discussion of Nsofu Pentecostalism to explore this issue, my aim is to simultaneously address another, namely, the question of Pentecostal sociality that is at the

heart of this paper. The way that Nsofu Pentecostals respond to the incompatibility of their economic experience with the belief that God has promised them abundant wealth sheds some light on how the prosperity gospel continues to influence believers even after it becomes apparent that they are not receiving the riches they have been promised. More importantly, by redefining prosperity in the face of the current economic reality of the Copperbelt, believers provide us with clues as to how their religious and material lives come together in ways that might foster social relationships. As we will see, this is closely tied to the question of economic differentiation.

The Equality of Penury; The Prosperity of Difference

When I first visited Freedom Bible Church early in 2008 I was lucky to get a seat. The church had been in existence for several years when I arrived, and by all accounts I found it at its peak. Even from far up the street one could hear the singing from the crowd gathered in the small classroom where the congregation met every Sunday morning. More than seventy adults crammed into the narrow school desks to listen to the charismatic preaching of the several young pastors who led the group. Adolescent women danced, mothers with babies on their backs threw up their hands in ecstatic prayer, and men in collars and ties balanced heavy Bibles across their laps, following the text during the sermon. More and more people came each week and there was talk of raising enough money to secure a plot for a church building, the great dream of every tiny Pentecostal congregation.

Given this forward momentum, I was surprised to find the schoolroom nearly empty when I arrived at Freedom for a regular Sunday morning service in May 2008. While the order of service went ahead as usual, moving from prayer, to singing, to a sermon, it was clear from

the outset that something was not right. Mr. Moyo, a prominent member of the congregation, began the meeting by assuring the few who had gathered that the church leadership was aware that people had been offended by a visiting pastor who had preached the previous Sunday, and that they were taking care to address the problem. He then went on to deliver an extemporaneous exhortation in which he reminded everyone that they were ‘successful’ regardless of how much money they made. Circumstances didn’t dictate success, he continued, and there was nothing wrong with living in a certain place or wearing certain things. He stated that he often wore *salaula* (second-hand clothes) and saw no problem with that – in fact, Mr. Moyo noted, by buying second-hand clothes one might be answering the prayer of those who sell them. Before asking the song leaders to come forward, Mr. Moyo made it a point to note that the prosperity gospel would ruin believers if they were not careful, as it could easily convince them that success was an overnight affair, rather than a long and slow process.

Later in the week, I called on my friends Bana Junior^{iv} and Bana Precious, both regular Freedom attendees, who helped me understand exactly what had made the message of the visiting pastor so troublesome. Even before delivering his sermon, Bana Precious explained, the preacher had made it clear that he didn’t think that people in the church had experienced prosperity. The pulpit that the congregation brought to the classroom every week was rather rickety, and when the visiting pastor got up to speak he made a point to say that he hadn’t expected to be preaching from something of such poor quality; when he returned to the church at a later date, he added, he expected to find a new podium. He then continued his message in the same vein, telling the group that they weren’t living in prosperity. Christians shouldn’t eat beans and vegetables, the pastor stated, but rather sausage and chicken. Nor should they wear *salaula*, but only new garments. In other words, Bana Junior explained, the

preacher said that Christians should always be those who lived at the top of society, spending their money on luxury goods and food rather than having to budget.

Let me pause at this point to say that both Bana Junior and Bana Precious, along with everyone else I knew who attended Freedom Bible Church, held a common commitment to the idea that God wanted them to have material success. After Mr. Moyo delivered his scathing indictment of the prosperity gospel, Pastor Ephraim, the leader of Freedom Bible Church, gave a sermon focused on the importance of wakefulness, which he defined in terms of wisdom and industriousness. These latter character traits, Pastor Ephraim stated, would allow people to experience prosperity.

The negative response to the visiting preacher was therefore not a commentary on the idea that Pentecostals ought to be moving forward. Rather, what people were reacting to was the assertion that all Christians ought to have arrived at the same point in their experience of divine success – that is, that all believers ought to be *equally* prosperous. As Bana Junior went on to explain to me, this was simply not the way things worked. ‘Did God mean for all people to be the same?’ she asked when I inquired about the sermon. Without missing a beat, Bana Junior answered her own question, arguing that the point of Christianity was not for everyone to be like everyone else. God made everyone to be different. For Bana Junior, this was not a question of individual self-realization as much as economic diversity. There were some who had a lot and some who had a little, she explained to me, and this did not mean that they weren’t Christians. Rather, they were all still growing – ‘Does a baby know everything when it’s born?’

This same rejection of uniform economic prosperity is evident in Mr. Moyo's denouncement of the visiting preacher's message. For Mr. Moyo, Christian success did not mean material equality. Indeed, as he pointed out, it is through economic difference that prosperity might be extended to others, as when one person buys second-hand clothing from a vendor in the market and contributes to the latter's wellbeing by patronizing her business. While the message of Nsofu Pentecostalism is certainly that believers ought to experience some sort of divinely ordained material progress, it is clear that in the local definition of prosperity the end result is not uniform success, but rather staggered advancement along an economic gradient. Just as economic inequality appears important to Copperbelt Pentecostal ideas of prosperity, material hierarchy is also central to local visions of national salvation.

Zambia Shall Be Saved!

The constitutional declaration that Zambia would be a 'Christian nation' is a frequent topic of public discussion among Pentecostals and other Christians from missionary-established denominations. While church leaders frequently debate exactly what it means for Zambia to be a Christian nation, Pentecostals routinely invoke 'the declaration' as a sort of promissory note for national salvation and, by proxy, prosperity. The frequency with which this idea was articulated during my fieldwork increased dramatically during the protracted illness and eventual death of President Mwanawasa in July and August of 2008.

On the Sunday after the official announcement that the president had passed away I attended the worship service at Key of David Church, another Nsofu Pentecostal congregation. That day the group's leader, Pastor Mwanza, delivered a sermon focused not only on the late president's many achievements, but also on the future of Zambia. I recorded this sermon and

later in the week invited Bana Sam and Bana Charles to review excerpts of the message and discuss its content. Both women are Pentecostals and members of Key of David Church. Near the end of our conversation we turned our attention to Pastor Mwanza's treatment of the 'destiny' of Zambia, which he had preached was 'assured' despite the unexpected death of the president.

NH: If I asked you, what is the destiny of Zambia, what do you think? What is the destiny of Zambia? Yesterday... someone said that Zambia has now become like Israel. He said we will be the Israel of Africa, like the chosen of Africa.

BS: It's true they declared that "Zambia is a Christian nation." And "Zambia shall be saved." In many things. That is what we have in mind. One day there will be no more hunger in Zambia.

BC: Yeah

BS: One day many people will work, they will be employed. That's what I think of these things. There will not be so much suffering. And many people will know God. And there will be fewer taverns.

BC: And more churches

.....

BS: ...The children of Israel when they went to the Promised Land, that was a land which was flowing milk and honey. So if we are saved we know God, meaning we will start working at good jobs, we will eat and be satisfied, we will worship God, if you're praying in church there won't be worries about what we will eat the next day... That's the way I see it. Free mind. You can walk away having left your clothes [on the

clothesline] and no one will take them. People only know God. They are not lacking anything.

In this conversation, Bana Sam begins by weaving together the constitutional declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation with the slogan 'Zambia shall be saved,' made popular by erstwhile vice president and Pentecostal televangelist Nevers Mumba, who currently serves as the Zambian ambassador to Canada. In so doing she elides the present and future tenses to paint a picture of what she imagines a fully formed Christian country will look like. Because of Bana Sam's commitment to Pentecostal notions of prosperity, these spiritual shifts are necessarily evidenced by material transformation: when Zambia is truly saved, people will not only worship God, but will enjoy steady employment and abundant food. As our conversation continued, however, it became clear that the vision these believers had of national salvation and prosperity was not characterized by uniform wealth, but rather by economic and spiritual differentiation.

NH: ...Would you say that that's the destiny of Zambia, eventually people will all be saved, they will know God –

BS: It's not everyone, Ba Naomi!... Not everyone will be saved.

BC: Not everyone

BS: But many people

.....

NH: Even, even if Zambia as a nation, in the future, it becomes part of that thing there will still be those who are not part of the same salvation?...
Even if it's the destiny for the whole nation, even if we say the whole nation is going forward, there will still be some who will not [go]?

BC: Yes

BS: Yes, but it should be a small number...

BC: Yes, very small...

BS: It can't be like this [like it is now]

BC: And then those who are poor, those who are dead last, I think, that number should also be reduced. There should only be a few of them, such that, maybe those in church will be able to help, you have the means to help them. Not like now, you look here, you look here, you look here –

BS: Everywhere something needs to be done

Bana Sam and Bana Charles' correction of my interpretation of their vision of Zambia's destiny is partly theological: not everyone will be saved. This doctrinal tenet of Pentecostalism is well documented throughout Africa and elsewhere in, for example, the way this religion relentlessly divides the world into binaries of good and evil, saved and damned (Meyer 1999). A Pentecostal song, popular during my fieldwork, quoted Jesus' admonition that not all those who call him Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven,^v ensuring that this particular text was rooted in the minds of anyone who spent time in the market or public buses where the song was regularly played on the radio.

However, this vision of the future – that is, the kind of social world that both women imagine as the logical outgrowth of the Pentecostal salvation in Zambia – is limited in scope for reasons that I believe extend beyond these theological issues. Bana Sam and Bana Charles made it clear that economic differentiation is a central component of prosperity as they define and envision it. In this way, their understanding of divinely authored material

advancement parallels that communicated by believers at Freedom Bible Church, who rejected the notion that prosperity meant uniform success. According to Bana Sam and Bana Charles, a country that is truly saved is not one in which everyone is rich, but one in which those who are have enough and are numerous enough to become benefactors of those who aren't. Put differently, the prosperity that these Pentecostals believed would follow national salvation was marked by relationships of inequality capable of facilitating material progress. This commitment to advancement through an interdependent material hierarchy turns our attention back to the issue of Pentecostal sociality. If the type of social world that believers understand to be an outgrowth of prosperity is one marked not only by progress, but also by difference, how does this vision relate to the wider context of Nsofu? In order to respond to this question, we must turn our attention to the role of inequality the political economy of the Copperbelt.

On the Social Productivity of Material Inequality

The rutted dirt roads of Nsofu are lined with a collection of privatized company houses, vacant lots piled with bricks, completed homes ringed with cinderblock walls, and other houses in various stages of construction. Some of the homes are occupied by their owners, who may be pensioners or workers at the mine; other houses are shared by families working on their construction; still others are rented to wage laborers. As this residential pattern suggests, Nsofu is a neighborhood marked by economic diversity (cf. Hansen 1997: 156-158). Widows who subsist largely on the charity of others, contract workers at the mine whose monthly salary is scarcely enough to pay the rent in a small 'cabin' in Nsofu^{vi}, teachers in public or private schools, and civil servants all live next door to each other.^{vii}

In Nsofu I lived in the home of Pastor Mwanza and his wife, who was a teacher at a private primary school in addition to being the assistant pastor at Key of David Church. Also in the household were Mrs. Mwanza's teenaged daughter, Musonda, and a man named Moses, who was a deacon at Key of David and had lived with the Mwanzas for nearly a year when I arrived in their home. It wasn't long before I became acquainted with the family's friends and neighbors. I noticed early on that the Mwanza family had one or two other families with which they frequently interacted and were quite close. In particular, I came to expect that nearly every day we would receive a visit from a member of Bana Ilunga's family.

Bana Ilunga and her husband and five children lived just down the street from the Mwanzas, where they rented a few rooms in an unfinished house that was not connected to basic services. Although Bana Ilunga's husband was employed at a local NGO, like many people on the Copperbelt he would routinely go months without being paid. Even when he did receive his salary on time it was often inadequate to cover the family's expenses. The Mwanza family, by comparison, was in a more stable financial situation. The difference in economic status between the two families was seen not only in the asymmetry of their visible assets, but also in the pattern of exchange that characterized their relationship. Gifts of food or cash flowed from the Mwanza family to the members of Bana Ilunga's family, who reciprocated in largely intangible ways, primarily labor. For example, one of Bana Ilunga's daughters would plait Mrs. Mwanza's hair; another would sweep the house if Musonda was away. In return, Bana Ilunga helped herself to the cassava leaves growing in the Mwanza's back yard, kept food in the family's deep freezer, and every few days received a bit of cooking oil, curry powder, or soap.

As time went on it became apparent that the pattern of exchange I observed between the Mwanza family and Bana Ilunga's family was in no way unique. During my fieldwork I conducted two rounds of domestic consumption surveys, which helped to refine my observations about the material life of homes in which I was not living. Over the course of one week participants kept a record of everything that went into and out of their house – that is, everything they bought and sold, gave and received. Because they were asked to provide information about their monthly incomes, and because all participants were people known to me, it became clear that inter-household exchanges most readily occurred between families of unequal economic status. Follow-up interviews and subsequent participant observation revealed that these kinds of exchanges usually resulted in enduring social relationships. Ultimately, I came to the conclusion that in Nsofu social ties most frequently formed between people or households of unequal economic status and crystallized in a pattern of exchange that further underscored the difference between the two parties (cf. Hansen 1985).^{viii}

In Nsofu, then, exchange relationships typically follow material inequality and are occasioned, at least in part, by the socioeconomic diversity of the township (Sahlins 1972: 210-215). Here it is important to point out that exchanges like those described above are not examples of sharing, much less attempts to level the economic playing field (Guyer 2004: 147). None of my informants ever spoke of their actions in these terms. Instead, in Nsofu the social ties developed through exchanges between individuals or households of unequal means are best understood as so many instances of two primary Copperbelt relational values: ambition and obligation. Here, bonds that connect one family to another of higher status constitute a means of social mobility, while ties to a household of lower status allow people to fulfill some of the responsibilities of their position by responding to others' material needs.^{ix} This framework of relational values and economic exchanges, while clearly providing for

everyone's potential progress, is dependent upon – and continually reproduces – economic difference.

Space does not permit me to describe Copperbelt social ties, or the exchanges that characterize them, in the detail they deserve. However, even this brief discussion reveals the importance of economic inequality to relational and material life in Nsofu. It is in this context that we are able to address one way Pentecostalism might facilitate social relationships on the Copperbelt. As we have seen, believers' visions of prosperity are expressed not in terms of universal wealth, but rather in relationships that span a graded continuum of progress. This emphasis on relationally and economically productive material hierarchy is evident not only in Pentecostal preaching and imagination, but in practice as well. As one final example will illustrate, for Nsofu believers the purchase and display of consumer goods represents a key point at which adherence to Pentecostalism, and to the locally redefined prosperity gospel, becomes socially productive.

Pots, a Power Outage, and a Pentecostal Pastor's Wife

During my fieldwork, Nsofu was routinely without electricity as part of a national load-shedding program. On one such darkened evening I sat together with Pastor Mwanza, Musonda, and Moses and debated whether or not to buy charcoal so that we could start cooking dinner on the brazier. Eventually we decided to wait for the electricity to come back rather than spend the necessary K2,000. Besides, there wasn't much in the house to cook. Musonda thought that perhaps her mother would return with groceries, since she was so long in coming home. Indeed, Mrs. Mwanza was particularly late in returning from work, and all of us wondered what could be keeping her.

Finally, we heard the unmistakable creak of the heavy black gate that divided the fenced-in front yard from the street. Moments later Mrs. Mwanza burst into the kitchen, weighed down by several plastic bags that she set down with a heavy thud, sending the candle on the table sputtering. Still breathless from the walk back from the bus station, Mrs. Mwanza began unpacking her various parcels, pulling tomatoes, onions, and greens from her sacks. The lumpy bulk of another bundle suggested dried beans. From inside of a large, blue plastic bag emblazoned with a picture of an American-style cowboy she pulled her most unexpected acquisition: a stack of five aluminum cooking pots bound together with plastic wrap. These were a familiar sight from my forays to the market in town, where vendors lined up nesting cookware like gleaming sets of matryoshka dolls. Musonda and I watched while her mother stood on her toes to reach over the too-big table to the shelves where the family's sundry kitchen equipment was kept. The pots we used every day were arranged neatly on the top shelf, and Mrs. Mwanza pulled them down before unwrapping her new cookware and lining it up in place of the old.

As she busied herself with this task, Mrs. Mwanza explained that she and her fellow teachers had taken their students on a fieldtrip that day, and that each of them had been given some money for food and other expenses. None of them had used it all. So, she went on, as soon as they returned the children to school at the end of the day all the teachers went straight to town, extra cash in hand. One of her coworkers, who was also the wife of a Pentecostal pastor, had bought a set of cookware, saying as she did that doing so was 'better than eating' the money (*chawama ukuchila ukulya*). This argument sounded compelling to Mrs. Mwanza, who followed her friend's example and bought a set of pots as well.

Mrs. Mwanza carefully arranged the five new pots from largest to smallest along the top shelf, turning them so their handles each pointed in the same straight angle towards the window above the sink. In the flickering candlelight we admired their shine, which Mrs. Mwanza contrasted to the dented and smudged surfaces of her old cookware. Because no one could enter the house without passing through the kitchen, Mrs. Mwanza felt sure that everyone who came to visit had seen her dingy pots lined up on the shelf. This she found deeply embarrassing, and especially inappropriate for a pastor's home, as they belied the Pentecostal message of divine provision and prosperity. In contrast, the new pots would reinforce this idea. At least now, Mrs. Mwanza noted with a sigh of contentment, everyone who called on the pastor would see that he and his family were 'living well' (*ukwikala bwino*).

Prosperity, Consumption, and Elective Affinity

The issue of material consumption among believers, represented by the story of Mrs. Mwanza's new cookware, raises the question of the Pentecostal sociality better than almost anything else. If previous discussions of the connection between this religion and capitalism have had little to say about the capacity of the former to forge social ties, they have been much clearer in their assertions that Pentecostalism is relationally corrosive. Often, such arguments are based on preachers' injunctions to 'Make a complete break with the past' (Meyer 1998) in order to find deliverance from the 'spirit of poverty' (Maxwell 1998). In other words, through the message of the prosperity gospel and warnings about the spiritual danger of non-believing relatives, Pentecostalism simultaneously promotes individual material consumption and creates the possibility that accumulated wealth might be privately enjoyed rather than shared with others (de Boeck 2004: 108; Gifford 2004: 105ff).

Analyses linking Pentecostalism to the pursuit of personal gain through the breakdown of social relationships are problematic on at least two fronts. First, the vast majority of these studies are based largely, if not exclusively, on sermons and interviews with church leaders. While these are certainly an important part of any anthropological discussion of Pentecostal ritual life, in the absence of a robust ethnographic engagement with those who spend their time listening to these messages it is impossible to determine the extent to which believers are putting their leaders' words into practice (cf. Engelke 2010). Secondly, the argument that Pentecostalism erodes relationships because it promotes and sanctions consumption is unsatisfying in its understanding of personal accumulation. While the centrality of material wealth in the rhetoric of the prosperity gospel is obvious, it is a mistake to read consumption – even that of the individualized, capitalist variety that Pentecostalism is so often seen to promote – as automatically socially corrosive. For, in places like Nsofu, personal accumulation is not simply about individual self-construction, but also about creating a particular kind of social world (Bloch and Parry 1989).

As we have seen, social relationships on the Copperbelt are structured around economic inequality. In Nsofu, as in other parts of Zambia (e.g. Pritchett 2001: 123-153), this material hierarchy is performed through the effective mobilization of wealth and consumer goods. Items like cookware or satellite dishes therefore serve as a language through which people establish their social position (see Sahlins 1976: 166ff; Ferguson 1999: 211-233). In this context, the importance of displays of material goods, whether cooking pots, a television set, or an empty tin of Nescafe, is clear. Such goods are given prominent positions in nearly every Copperbelt home, regardless of religious affiliation (cf. Hansen 1997: 158-160). Given the ubiquity of these displays, we might ask what, if anything, the story of Mrs. Mwanza's purchase shows us about Pentecostalism. Responding to this question requires us to briefly

turn to Weber, for it is here that the connection to his study of the Protestant Ethic is most prominent.

Like Copperbelt Pentecostals, early Protestants, at least in Weber's treatment, viewed their material lives as indexes of their spiritual status. In the case of European Calvinists, because faithful adherence to an earthly vocation served as a sign of divine election, capitalist investment and profit easily followed religious piety. Similarly, for Pentecostals in urban Zambia, individual prosperity is understood not only as a sign of salvation, but also as an apologetic to non-believing relatives or neighbors. Bana Karen, a member of Key of David Church, explained to me this way:

NH: Are Christians supposed to prosper?

BK: Definitely

NH: Why?

BK: We are entitled to. That is ours, this very thing, this is God's will... that we prosper. So in everything, we should prosper. We should be prospering more than non-believers.

NH: ...Why should you prosper more than non-believers?

BK: We [Pentecostals] must set an example. They [non-believers] must see... maybe there is someone who is difficult, someone who has trouble coming quickly to Christ, you are telling them about God, so at least even before you even speak, they just see. If they see – some people are difficult – but if they see, maybe they might be, one day they will ask you... maybe in the end they will become believers, just like that.

Because Pentecostalism on the Copperbelt imbues personal economic success with evangelistic value, the display of material goods carries special weight for believers in Nsofu.^x I often heard Pastor Mwanza speak with a mixture of incredulity and distain of anyone who had wealth and did not show it; miserliness, it seemed, was something that this preacher could not condone, or even understand. If in Pentecostalism believers are encouraged not only to pursue personal accumulation, as most previous analyses have agreed, but also to make those acquisitions visible, how do these religiously motivated economic actions fit into the wider material reality of the Copperbelt? Specifically, what is the social role of display in this community? The answer to these questions is found in the above discussion of exchange relationships between households of different material positions.

When people are ranked by their financial status, and status is made visible through demonstrations of wealth, it is things like new cooking pots on the kitchen shelf that open the door for kin and neighbors to make specific material requests based on the evidence of another's ability to respond (Guyer 2004: 147). In other words, through the display of consumer goods, residents of Nsofu not only index their economic standing, but also signal their position as potential exchange partners to people of both higher and lower status. The bonds formed by such exchanges between people of different material positions are, as we have seen, the stuff of Copperbelt social life. Rather than marking an end to interpersonal relationships, then, conspicuous consumption in Nsofu lends itself much more readily to the formation of social ties through the relationship-building transactions that follow material inequality in this community.^{xi}

If we read the connection among display, exchange, and sociality in these terms, Mrs. Mwanza's purchase of new cooking pots appears not simply as an instance of personalized,

late-capitalist consumption, but as an investment in a visible marker of status through which she and her family take their place in the community. Her display facilitates – indeed, invites – exchange, and the enduring social relationships that follow from it. With this perspective on the material accumulation of Pentecostals in mind, we are able to turn once more to how the religious practice of local believers involves them in the social life of their community.

Conclusion: Pentecostal Inequality and Political Economy

On the Zambian Copperbelt, Pentecostal practice promotes material inequality and display, and therefore serves to embed believers in social relationships. As the example of Mrs. Mwanza's pots illustrates, this happens partly through a Weberian process of elective affinity between the apologetic stance of Pentecostalism and the kinds of consumption and subsequent display that structure exchange relationships in Nsofu. By encouraging them to make whatever wealth they have visible so that others will see that they are 'staying well,' preachers promote religious practices that establish believers in a visible hierarchy of wealth, which in turn creates social relationships by facilitating exchange. The fact that evangelistic display is aimed at those outside the Pentecostal fold means that there is a strong possibility that enduring exchange relationships will develop between believers and their non-believing neighbors. In this way, the material aspects of Copperbelt religious practice foster the integration of believers in social networks that extend beyond the boundaries of their religious cohort.

In addition to promoting visible economic inequality through the display of consumer goods, Pentecostalism serves as a catalyst for social relationships in other ways. Local definitions of prosperity, which reflect the cultural values of the Copperbelt by highlighting material

difference, also work to connect believers to financial networks that potentially reach outside the church. Recall Mr. Moyo's message to the members of Freedom Bible Church: success is not about everyone enjoying the lavish riches of the prosperity gospel, whether luxury cars or designer suits. Instead, prosperity is defined in terms of an interdependent material hierarchy that allows everyone to advance his or her relative economic position, as when one person patronizes another's business. Here, believers were encouraged to participate in the market in ways that, like exchanges between households, reached across economic rank to form relationships that promote others' wellbeing.

Similarly, Mrs. Mwanza's actions after buying new cookware indicate that this materially stratified notion of prosperity is also important to Pentecostal non-market, inter-household exchange. After she had arranged her new pots in the kitchen, Mrs. Mwanza set most of her old cookware aside to pass along to Bana Ilunga and to the young wife of the church groundskeeper. By giving out of her surplus Mrs. Mwanza enacted a hierarchical prosperity in which those in need benefited from those with a little extra. All three women participated in this exchange relationship in a way that was simultaneously identifiable to them as a foretaste of their community's salvation and an instance of the wider Copperbelt social reality.

The examples of Pentecostalism on the Zambian Copperbelt provided in this paper have shown some of the direct and indirect ways in which this religion fosters believers' integration in the economic and social life of their community. In exploring this idea, my aim has been to expand our understanding of Pentecostal sociality in a particular urban setting. At the same time, by discussing how Nsofu believers are reconfiguring the idea of prosperity in the absence of the lavish wealth typically associated with the prosperity gospel, this paper

has also taken a step towards addressing the question of this religion's staying power despite its failure to make good on its promises. On the Zambian Copperbelt, Pentecostal ethics and neoliberal spirits meet in extant social and economic forms, but also create new networks. In the light of numerous cultural settings in which Pentecostalism and neoliberalism have crossed paths, this connection will doubtless continue to be a valuable site for ethnographic engagement.

Notes:

ⁱ I carried out fieldwork on the Copperbelt during a preliminary trip from June-August 2006 and a long-term field project from February 2008 – July 2009.

ⁱⁱ In 1996 the preamble to the newly amended Zambian constitution declared that ‘the Republic [will be] a Christian nation while upholding the right of every person to enjoy that person's freedom of conscience or religion.’

ⁱⁱⁱ When I asked my informants to help me find a Bemba equivalent for the English word ‘prosperity,’ they often found it difficult to translate. The most common response to this query was the phrase, ‘*ukuya pantanshi*,’ (to go forward).

^{iv} In Zambia, as in most of southern Africa, teknonymy is routine; e.g. Bana Junior is ‘Junior’s’ mother.

^v Matthew 7:21. The opening line of the song is, ‘No, it’s not everyone...’ (*Awe, te bonse...*)

^{vi} During my fieldwork workers employed by the mine on a contract basis earned K300,000 a month (about \$60).

^{vii} In many ways, Nsofu was a microcosm of the rest of the country. According to the Zambian Central Statistics office, in 2004 the mean monthly income for a Zambian household in 2004 was K 511, 377. However, only about one in every three households (35 percent) had mean monthly incomes that exceeded K 300, 000; implying that the majority of Zambian households, or approximately 65 percent, had incomes that were insufficient to meet their basic needs. See: <http://www.zamstats.gov.zm/lcm.php#02> for further statistics.

Near the end of my fieldwork I administered an anonymous survey in nine Pentecostal congregations in and around Nsofu. The total response was 389 people over age 15 (169 males, 220 females), most of them residents of the township. Although these numbers are too small to constitute a statistically significant picture of the community, they indicate not only a wide range of economic diversity, but results that mirror those of the national survey. Among the males, 43% reported monthly incomes below K250,000, while 66% of females reported incomes below this amount. In 2006 the minimum wage in Zambia was set at a monthly salary of K268,000 (about \$50 at the current exchange rate), which means that about half of the people in Nsofu were making less than that amount, and half more (in some cases, much more).

^{viii} Often, the same household would occupy one side of an exchange relationship with one household and the other side with another; that is, while a family might be involved in one connection as a giver of material goods and recipient of intangible returns, it might be receiving material goods from another household whose financial situation was better still. This was certainly the case of the Mwanza family. In addition to the Mwanzas' friendship with Bana Ilunga, near the end of my fieldwork they also became quite close to a family that had recently arrived in Nsofu. The family was very well off and consistently contributed gifts to the Mwanza home, while the Mwanzas offered spiritual services in return.

^{ix} The dual relational ethic that I am describing in terms of ambition and obligation is evident throughout the Copperbelt ethnographic record. Early analyses of urban Zambia consistently highlight the need to balance individual advancement against the needs and desires of one's extended family (e.g. Wilson 1941; Mitchell 1957; Epstein 1961). Similarly, in his more recent study of the Copperbelt, Ferguson (1999) identifies two Copperbelt 'styles' that he describes as 'localist' and 'cosmopolitan' in orientation. Here, the former could also be identified in terms of obligation to extended family, while the latter represent ambitions toward the wealth and prestige of the globalized economy.

^x Here we see a central difference between Weber's Calvinists and Nsofu Pentecostals: while early Protestants in Northern Europe sought to set themselves apart by their labor, thereby confirming their status among the elect, Copperbelt believers are involved in religiously motivated economic activities designed to promote relationships with those outside their religious cohort.

^{xi} This is not to say that there are not members of the community who accumulate wealth without participating in the kinds of cross-class relationships that I have described in Nsofu. However, this is socially risky behavior, as a refusal to engage in this kind of sociality opens a person up to accusations of witchcraft or Satanism.

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